

## HENRY GEORGE'S NEW WORK.

AN ASSAULT ON HERBERT SPENCER.

A PERPLEXED PHILOSOPHER. By Henry George. 12mo, pp. 310. Charles L. Webster &amp; Co.

This volume involves an analysis of Herbert Spencer's various utterances on the land question, and incidental criticism of his principles and methods of his synthetic philosophy. Mr. George's primary object is to defend his own positions on a great subject which has engrossed his attention and brought him into the front rank of controversial writers of the time. When he opened his discussion of the Land Question, he referred to Herbert Spencer as an authority who supported his views respecting the inalienable and natural right of man to land. As Mr. George explains the matter, he was directly and indirectly instrumental in giving to Mr. Spencer's earlier conclusions a much greater circulation than his own books would have given them. If Mr. George had exercised greater self-restraint he would have admitted more modestly that it was through his ability to cite the passages from Mr. Spencer's "Social Ethics" in relation to land that he was enabled, as a young and unknown writer, to command public attention and to force his way into the field of controversy. Whatever may have been the mutual obligations of these eminent writers, Mr. Spencer's latest and most mature reflections upon this subject have deprived Mr. George of the advantage of which he made full use at an earlier period. Since he can no longer refer to Mr. Spencer as an authority on his own side, he is forced to regard him as an antagonist who has ceased to be an independent, logical and honest thinker. This volume is a deliberate attempt to discredit not only Herbert Spencer's revised and more carefully stated views on the land question, but also his entire method of philosophical and scientific investigation.

In one respect at least Mr. George shows himself to be an honorable critic and a foeman worthy of the philosopher's steel. The reader will find in this volume every word which Mr. Spencer has published on the land question from 1850 to 1892.

The earliest passages in "Social Statics" are reprinted without the suppression of a single sentence; then follow Mr. Spencer's famous letters to "The St. James's Gazette" and "The Times" (London), under the head of "Reputation"; and finally the last utterances in "Justice" are cited in full and critically examined. Not merely is the philosopher treated with full justice, but there is no attempt on the part of Mr. George to quibble over phrases or to break the force of what he considers a recantation. He accepts Mr. Spencer's present attitude as one of uncompromising hostility to the author's own views of the only possible solution of social and political problems of the present time.

With the ground cleared and the main issue defined, he challenges Mr. Spencer's soundness as a reasoner and his intellectual honesty, and after ridiculing him as a philosopher and pronouncing him, with what we might describe as stark naked candor, altogether contemptible as a man, makes a direct attack upon the synthetic method and a system of evolution that is essentially materialistic in eliminating the spiritual element.

It is needless to state that the dialectics of this book reveal refinement of analytical powers and consummate argumentative skill. Mr. George is always direct in his method of attack. He boldly faces the entanglements in front of him, and, concentrating his fire upon them, invariably attempts to carry them by storm. He does not have recourse to flank movements, or to any system of gradual approaches, but forces the fighting in the open field with splendid energy and force, and always at short range. His style is never lacking in lucidity, and is trenchant and sparkling with vivacity even when he is disengaging the subtleties of an abstract question of ethics or economics. Controversy is as the breath of his life. Every page bears witness to the pleasure which he finds in measuring swords with one of the greatest thinkers of the age.

His method is one of luminous simplicity. He begins by proving that Mr. Spencer in 1850 emphatically denied the justice of the present system of land ownership, but that he subsequently seemed anxious to explain away what he had said, and in his final work defended as just what he had originally denounced as unjust. The main portion of the book is devoted to a critical examination of the chapters in "Justice" in which the land question is discussed, and which disclose a change from a cleverly reasoned opinion to its opposite. Mr. George contends that the premises in "Justice" are the same as in "Social Statics," but that the conclusion is a different one, and one not deducible from them. That is to say, Mr. Spencer, in now sustaining private property in land, asserts the same principle of equal liberty from which he originally deduced its condemnation. The critic is not content with showing that the philosopher contradicts his first work when he publishes the revised and expurgated edition, and supplements it with labored chapters in defense of ownership in land. He cites Mr. Spencer's own formula of justice, and affirms that the rights of existing landowners to monopolize land on which all must live are not deducible from the law of equal freedom. This is equivalent to a demonstration of the inherent weakness of Mr. Spencer's final argument as unsound and illogical, without reference to the lack of continuity between the earliest and the latest utterances of the founder of the synthetic philosophy.

What Mr. George does is to present in those passages on the land question a cross-section of Mr. Spencer's philosophical writings; and when he finds the grain running counter to his own social theories, and, as he looks at it, out of harmony with itself, he condemns the whole system of social investigation as incongruous, and the philosopher himself as deficient in intellectual honesty and in capacity for careful, logical reasoning. "In his first book," he remarks, "written when he believed in God, in a divine order, in a moral sense, and which he has now eschewed, he does appear as an honest and fearless, though sometimes too careless a thinker. But that part of our examination which crosses what is now his distinctive philosophy shows him to be, as a philosopher ridiculous, as a man contemptible—a frowning Vicar of Bray, clothing in pompous phraseology and arrogant assumption logical confusions so absurd as to be comical."

What Mr. George does is to attempt to discredit one of the foremost thinkers and most profound writers of the age as a time-serving charlatan and hypocrite, whose system of philosophy is radically unsound and dishonest. And why? Because he has chosen, after the mature deliberation of a lifetime, to suppress passages from his earliest writings, from which Mr. George had derived advantages in aid in the discussion of the land question, and to render it impossible for any social agitator to take any liberties with the revised text. If Mr. Spencer had neglected these precautions, this cross-section of his philosophical works would not have offended Mr. George's eyes. The grain would then have run with his theories, and the whole system of philosophy would have seemed sound in principle and symmetrical in form. Mr. George in those circumstances would not have been found branding Herbert Spencer as intellectually and morally beneath contempt.

Mr. George, in his fiery controversial zeal, succeeds in making himself ridiculous in this volume. The dialectics are keen, but the temper of the performance is very bad. Such a chapter as that on "Principal Brown" is unworthy of a volume of serious argument. It is not powerful or satire; it is only a coarse parody to reinforce furious diatribes against a philosopher whom he considers himself licensed to denounce as a traitor to truth. What Mr. George needs as a controversialist is a touch of Matthew Arnold's gospel of sweetness and light. Vehemence and bitterness are not sources of power.

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The bids must be addressed to the "Superintendent of Public Works," Washington, D. C., sealed and impounded, as follows:

First. The price per package for all distances within the port of New-York, including ferrage for certain districts, to be paid in advance, and for the removal of the piers, vessels and from the wharves, and the depositing and spreading of material on Leaser Island. Specifications, plans, forms, and all information required to be given to the Collector of Customs, for the casting of durable masonry piers required at New York, from time to time, to support the wharves of February, 1893.

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